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L' UMILE PIANTA.

FOR THE CHILDREN'S SAKE.

A FEW WORDS ON NEUROTIC CHILDREN.

THAT the neurotic child is very common in the nurseries and schoolrooms of to-day, everyone whose work takes them into nurseries and schoolrooms will freely acknowledge. An element so large needs special study, so I think a few words concerning such children will not be out of place in our Magazine.

Every day it is better realised by the medical profession that wrong mental hygiene in youth may sow the seeds of intractable moral and intellectual disease in later life. This is more especially so in the case of those children who are of the neurotic or nervous temperament. In these, nervous force is highly developed. If they are understood and managed properly great things may, in God's good time, be expected of them. If, on the other hand, they are forced through the ordinary educational mill, which works fairly with the average child, we may look for irregular manifestations or explosions of nerve force during childhood, and warped and injured characters in later life. These children are bound to be unlike others, and to develop in ways of their own. In the right environment they may become the very salt of the earth; misunderstood and mis-managed they will be the lopsided and eccentric members of Society, often a trial to themselves and others.

Of the neurotic child there are innumerable varieties, and, like other children, only to a greater degree, each individual demands careful personal study from those who are responsible for its well-

being. This granted, it has seemed to me that the greater number of these children may be roughly grouped into two great types, which we may call (a) the protected and (b) the unprotected neurotic types. From the natural history of the first kind I think we can learn much to guide us in our treatment of the second.

The protected type may be described as "Ugly Ducklings." They generally seem backward, and often show absolute stupidity at lessons, unless these relate to subjects which they find of special interest. Those who know these children intimately realise that they are not so backward as they appear. They are absorbed and thoughtful, and generally devote much time and energy to hobbies of their own. It seems as if in them some of the inhibiting or hindering centres in the brain were abnormally developed, and that it is really out of the children's power to exert themselves along uncongenial lines. In other directions control is feeble enough, and the line of thought or action runs off without interference.

This fixed inhibition seems to form a kind of self-protecting mantle to the mind of the child. Do your best you cannot get through it to the more excitable elements, and therefore, try as you may, you cannot over-work or over stimulate. The mind is naturally protected and the fruit can ripen. If I had time to work out examples of this type, I could show you that Wordsworth and Darwin and many other of our great men belonged to it. They did little at school, less at college, were the despair of their teachers, and often trials to their friends; but each in his own way, working along his own lines, gave to the world a heritage for which mankind will evermore be the richer. Give children of this type space to grow, and let those about them be reverent and reticent. They will see through conventions to the principles underlying facts, and from these will develop the intuition of truth. In good time the child becomes aware of his growing wings, and it is well for him and the world if he is allowed to shape his life according to the light of his personal inspiration.

Far different is it with children of the second class. These are they who, nervous and excitable, full of neurotic manifestations and explosions, precocious, brilliant, and sympathetic, are open to every influence from surrounding individualities, and respond at once to the slightest external pressure. Such children are terribly open to the influence of other minds, and all such influence constitutes for them an added danger. They are the stuff of which thought-readers and "mediums" are made, and parents and

teachers have to exercise the utmost self-control and caution to avoid all such unhealthy inroads on the developing personality of the child. We must apply externally in the life and surroundings the protection which is not there by nature. We must keep back rather than stimulate, and take the greatest pains to make sure that everything taught is really understood and assimilated instead of being a reproduction of the thought and mind of the teacher. It is a good plan to make such children responsible for explaining and teaching what they have learnt to others younger than themselves, because nothing mirrored from the mind of another can be analysed and explained. See that no one mind, be it that of parent, teacher or friend, gets a preponderating influence, and strive all you can to give the growing mind the space and rest which such thought-absorbers are naturally incapable of maintaining for themselves.

I cannot do better than end these fragmentary suggestions by a quotation from the writings of a neurotic of this second class, one who has fought her battle and come out at the other side in possession of a clear vision of her own proper position in the universe. Speaking of another like herself she says, "I know that I may say in her name as much as in my own, that we, who have received in any marked degree the power of absorbing thought by contact with thinkers, cannot safely either indulge any earthly ambition of our own, or allow ourselves to become the tools of any one order of human intellect. Our function is to be servants of that unseen Truth, whose vesture of many coloured truths the intellects of the earth rend between them; and humble prophets of that Eternal Unity, fidelity to whom is for us health, light, and life."

HELEN WEBB.

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